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WORLD NEWS

Israelis Uneasy About Pollard Spy Case and U.S. Reaction to It

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JERUSALEM, Dec. 17—A former top official of Israel's renowned external intelligence agency, the Mossad, shook his head in disbelief as he spoke of what he said was his country's mistaken involvement with accused American spy Jonathan Jay Pollard.

It was an amateurish and ill-conceived operation, the retired 17-year Mossad veteran said, his voice showing disappointment. Israel's relationship with the United States is too important to risk jeopardizing it in such a clumsy manner, he added.

"It's painful for Israelis because of the clandestine style. We have a moral problem," he said. "You can't take the money of the United States, and then use that money to buy information about that country."

Israel, one of America's closest allies, received \$3.5 billion in U.S. foreign aid this year, more than any other country.

But the former Mossad official and other Israelis say they are troubled by what they now perceive to be the new legitimacy anti-Israeli attitudes have been given within some parts of the U.S. government as a result of the Pollard case. Many Israelis also express disagreement with their government's unprecedented decision to allow the questioning of Israeli diplomats by U.S. officials on Israeli soil.

"This I can't swallow," said the former intelligence official, who bears a striking resemblance to the Alec Guinness television portrayal of George Smiley, the fictional British intelligence agent. He spoke on the condition that his identity not be disclosed. "It's an affront," he said. "Would the U.S. allow a foreigner to interview [William] Casey?"—the Central Intelligence Agency director.

The Pollard affair "was a mistake, but these things happen," he said. "The Bay of Pigs was a mistake too."

Interviews with about a dozen Israelis—politicians, businessmen, former intelligence agents and journalists—over the past week repeatedly turned up the same dual themes: the Pollard affair was a grave mistake for Israel but there is increasing anger at the United States for what Israelis believe is Washington's preoccupation with Pollard, a civilian Navy analyst charged with selling U.S. secrets to Israel.

"Our feeling is that [some U.S. officials] are after Israel," said a former head of the Mossad, Isser Harel. "I'm very negative about what happened on our side, [but] without trying to understand the whole aspects of our relationship now you see how all this picture is distorted."

"We have the feeling we're being hunted," said Simcha Dinitz, a Labor Party legislator and a former Israeli ambassador to the United States. Dinitz was referring to last week's disclosures of a U.S. Customs investigation into possible illegal transfer of weapons technology to Israel and new U.S. restrictions on the exchange of intelligence with the Israeli government.

The latest U.S. actions directed at Israel came shortly after a delegation of U.S. Justice and State department officials arrived here to gather information about Pollard's alleged spying. The U.S. team was expected to interview Israeli officials implicated with Pollard and gain a fuller assessment of possible national security damage caused by Pollard's alleged sale of classified Navy documents to the Israelis.

The talks continue under secrecy, but informed sources said today that both sides are cooperating after spending the first 24 hours or so in intense negotiations working out the ground rules for interviewing three Israeli officials implicated with Pollard.

"The spirit and substance of cooperation right now are very positive," one Israeli official said.

Sources said the U.S. team has maintained a grueling pace, shuttling back and forth from Jerusalem, where the delegation is housed, to Tel Aviv, where many of the meetings are taking place.

Security at one Jerusalem hotel where some members of the U.S. delegation are staying is so tight that for the first few days telephone calls to team members' rooms were blocked and rerouted through a control room in the hotel maintained by U.S. Embassy officials.

Outside calls were finally allowed in late Saturday after Victoria Toensing, the wife of Joseph diGenova, the U.S. attorney for the District of Columbia and a member of the U.S. team, complained that hotel operators blocked a call to her from diGenova, sources said. DiGenova was trying to reach his wife to say that he was going to miss dinner because the talks were continuing

late. Toensing got the message but not from her husband.

Meanwhile, the Israeli press has virtually given up reporting on the Pollard case because of the news blackout.

Both governments have agreed not to disclose details of the talks while the investigation here is under way, but the extraordinary secrecy is said also to reflect the sensitivity the Pollard case has for the government of Prime Minister Shimon Peres and for Israelis in general.

"Even in your worst dreams, you can't image how sensitive" the case is, one Israeli official said. "I don't say even a word about this subject," said the usually forthcoming official, who asked not to be identified. "It is the best for my health."

An Israeli government lawyer said the unwillingness of many government officials to publicly discuss the Pollard case is partly a manifestation of embarrassment.

"It's not a subject people like to talk about," he said. "When you're caught with your pants down you shut up. Everybody is aware of the fact that the relationship with the United States is all important. We've got to get this issue behind us."